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DE RUEHVB #0898 2080935
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R 270935Z JUL 06
FM AMEMBASSY ZAGREB
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 6450
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L ZAGREB 000898

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/26/2016
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SUBJECT: NEW PAGE IN RELATIONS WITH SERBIA?

REF: A. ZAGREB 836
[1](#)B. BELGRADE 1149

Classified By: Political Officer Tom Selinger for reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: PM Ivo Sanader capped a recent surge in bilateral contact between Serbia and Croatia by opening the new Bajakovo-Batrovci border crossing with Serbian PM Kostunica on July 21 and traveling to Belgrade for meetings with both Kostunica and Serbian President Tadic. While the neighbors' common future in Europe dominated public statements, MFA contacts have told Post that Sanader's visit produced concrete progress on several key open issues, including border demarcation, war crimes prosecutions, and cultural preservation. Sanader committed the GoC to assisting Serbia with its Action Plan for cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) (ref B) and to supporting Serbia in various multilateral fora. Sanader welcomed President Tadic's plan to include a Croat as a candidate on his party's electoral list, and, in the context of the new constitution, to seek a guaranteed parliamentary seat for the Croatian minority. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

PUBLIC THEME: COMMON EUROPEAN GOALS

[1](#)2. (U) At the opening of the border crossing, Sanader publicly reaffirmed the GoC's commitment to helping Serbia reach the common goal of joining the EU, saying &I see Croatia and Serbia tomorrow in a united Europe.⁸ Playing on Croatia's self-proclaimed role to lead the region through Euro-Atlantic integration, Sanader said he would like to see Serbia sign a Stabilization and Association Agreement with the EU by the year's end.

[1](#)3. (C) MFA State Secretary Hidajet Biscevic told Charge July 24 that PM Sanader and PM Kostunica agreed to revive the dormant border commission and open negotiations in September to better define and demarcate the joint border. The GoC is anxious to see Serbia de-militarize its border with Croatia, head of MFA's Department for Southeast Europe Aleksander Stipetic told PolOff July 25. It is the only remaining border in Europe, according to Stipetic, still patrolled by military forces.

MOVING PAST WAR LEGACIES: WAR CRIMES AND REFUGEES

[1](#)4. (C) Biscevic reported that PM Sanader raised with PM Kostunica a Croatian initiative to exchange evidence in local war crimes investigations in order to overcome constitutional barriers to extraditing citizens. Under the initiative, Chief State Prosecutor Mladen Bajic would provide evidence to his Serbian counterpart in cases where the crime was

committed in Croatia but the suspected perpetrator is resident in Serbia. Belgrade's state prosecutor would then decide whether to press charges in Serbia. If Croatia is satisfied with how the case proceeds within Serbia, it will drop charges in Croatia. Croatia has already initiated a similar strategy with Montenegro. Serbian and Croatian Ministers of Justice as well as state prosecutors will meet in September to discuss the plan, according to Biscevic.

15. (C) Stipetic told PolOff that during the visit PM Sanader called for the full integration of ethnic Serbs into Croatian society, calling it the foundation for the future.⁸ The GoC, according to Stipetic, has removed all political obstacles to Serb refugee returns, but economic barriers, such as rampant unemployment in return areas, remain.

KOSOVO'S FINAL STATUS MUST BE DETERMINED WITH BELGRADE

16. (C) Sanader repeated the GoC's position on Kosovo, according to Stipetic, insisting that Belgrade be involved in determining Kosovo's final status. Croatia's support for a Kosovo solution, Stipetic told PolOff, will depend on Serbian acceptance of it. The relationship between Croatia and Serbia is the key to the entire region's stability, he explained, and an unacceptable imposition of Kosovo's status by the international community would possibly destabilize Serbia and threaten the region.

DELAWIE